

Commonwealth Corps in Action

Strengthening the bonds of common purpose and
uniting people in service for the common good

Mid-Year Newsletter

Winter 2008-2009

Quick Facts:

- 274 Corps members are actively serving with 36 partner organizations
- Over 47,000 people have benefitted from Corps programs so far
- Corps members have mobilized an additional 1,849 community volunteers
- Corps members serve in full-time, part-time and flex-time capacities
- Members are serving in local community and regional organizations spanning across the Commonwealth

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Welcome

Welcome to our first Commonwealth Corps newsletter. It marks the mid-point of our Corps' first service year. Each member of the 274-strong Corps has made a commitment to bring solutions to the mighty challenges we face today by taking action, reaching out to their neighbors and increasing capacity to respond to local needs. In communities throughout the Bay State, I have had the opportunity to speak with Corps members. They have told me about what motivates them to serve and their experiences on the ground. I am impressed by the strength and passion that drives their service. From the seniors who share their love of life by tutoring children and fighting hunger to the college students who mentor high school students on the path to higher education, the Corps members have an astonishing reservoir of kindness and spirit. In a few short months, we have answered thousands of crisis calls, created new community resources, and worked in a group of over one hundred to refurbish a community college. The individual stories, the organizational change and the mobilization of volunteers – this is our Corps. I urge you to continue helping make Massachusetts stronger - in a time where the light at the end of the tunnel may seem distant, working towards a common purpose is most important. Thank you for your commitment to the betterment of our Commonwealth.



Commonwealth Corps, Making a Difference!

In November 2007, Governor Patrick launched the Commonwealth Corps; calling on Massachusetts residents to join a statewide volunteerism movement to engage individuals in direct service opportunities. 15 months, 36 sponsor organizations and



274 members later, Commonwealth Corps is committed to advancing communities by providing solutions to critical, unmet needs. At an average of 800 hours per member, the Corps will have provided service worth approximately \$5.3 million in their service year. Prior to the Corps, Codman Academy Charter Public

School in Boston began last year with only 11 volunteers serving 11 students. Today, their "Tutors for All" Corps members have recruited over 70 additional volunteers to serve 90 students one-on-one in just four months. Literacy Volunteers of Massachusetts Corps will have leveraged an additional 90 volunteers and are now able to expand their tutoring services to new locations in Framingham, Southbridge, Natick and Wellesley. Coordinators at the MLK Jr. Community Center in Springfield, an organization targeting at-risk youth to help them develop goal setting, communication, and accountability skills, say they have already seen a change in the demeanor and actions these young adults have toward the community. As a result of the Corps, they have reached 300 beneficiar-

ies to date and expect to reach 800 in their service year. The strength of the Corps resonates throughout Bay State communities. Commonwealth Corps members and the 1,842+ volunteers they have recruited since the program's inception



have so far provided direct services to over 47,000 beneficiaries. From the holocaust survivor, to the mentee who is now a mentor, to the volunteer who is now leading more volunteers, the stories of Corps members represent a commitment to service and a community that sees its shared responsibility in its shared prosperity.

Getting ready for the service year: Corps participate in Early Service Training

Corps members geared up for their service year by participating in a one-day Early Service Training workshop in November held in Boston and Holyoke and facilitated



by Massachusetts Service Alliance. The training provided service leadership tools and an opportunity for members to connect as a larger Corps, sharing their different project areas. "I really enjoyed seeing the Commonwealth Corps come to life! For the past months it

has felt like an awesome vision, [and] is now a reality!" one Corps member stated at the end of the day. Shoshanna Cogan, who serves as lead facilitator for VISTA Early Service Training in the Northeast, uniquely crafted the training to strengthen corps members' ethic of service; and build corps members' skills around key competencies in the areas of community relationship building, and volunteer generation and management.

Corps members were able to set personal and project-related goals, learn techniques for effective organizational and community entry, build skills for effective cross-cultural communication, and identify best practices for recruiting and man-

aging volunteers. A corps member evaluation read, "[Ms. Cogan] didn't only teach us new skills, but [also] empowered us to use the tools she implemented."



Thank you to the team who dared to have the vision."

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Difference**



Minuteman Senior Services, Burlington
Corps members have expanded the capacity to provide critical services to 200 beneficiaries by maximizing the ability to see more clients, improving the resources database, helping seniors complete benefit applications, increased funding support for protective service activities and more.

Middlesex County Boys & Girls Club opens doors in Everett

This March, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Middlesex County is expanding opportunities for young people; opening a new club site in the city of Everett with the help of Commonwealth Corps members. Corps members have worked tirelessly with City officials, community members, and Corporations to turn the first floor of the old Everett High School into a welcoming atmosphere for teens. Corps members helped secure product donations and gift cards for supplies and furniture while helping recruit and hire a well rounded staff who will engage and inspire Everett teens. "I cannot say enough about how much service programming such as the Commonwealth Corps has impacted our organization. It has made the "impossible"

possible. We are opening a new Club in a community that has needed one for many years, answering the call of hundreds of teens" states Mechilia Eng, Executive Director Boys & Girls Club of Middlesex County. Since 1973, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Middlesex County has been helping youth within the Cambridge, Medford and Somerville communities. In Everett, there are many options for youth aged 6-13 for after school programming but the city has lacked non-sport options available to Everett teens. Recognizing this need, the Club worked in partnership with State Senator Anthony Galluccio to develop plans to create a space to provide positive recreational and educational activities for youth during

non-school hours. The vision: Club staff would create programs that promote personal growth and positive social interaction and preventing behavior which has a negative effect on themselves and others. Additionally, the Club would provide positive role models to inspire and motivate youth to set personal goals and to become contributing members to the community. "Everett Teen Center developed from an idea into an actual club with members. Based on feedback from local Teens and their parents, this is a much anticipated and great addition to the community. It has been an amazing experience to be a part of the Commonwealth Corps!" says Corps member Sheila Ryan.



Commemorating Dr. MLK Jr.'s Legacy: Building on the National Service Movement

Across the nation millions of people signed on to make Martin Luther King Jr. Day a "day on, not a day off," with over 13,000 service projects taken place on January 19th, 2009; this year's service event marked the largest turnout of volunteers since its inception. President Obama's call to service rippled across the country and was met by a reinvigorated sense of service that touched all sectors of the society. In Massachusetts, Governor Patrick issued a proclamation declaring January 17-19th as a weekend of service

in honor of MLK Jr. urging "all the citizens of the Commonwealth to take cognizance of this event and participate fittingly in its obser-



vance." Communities statewide organized activities and among these were events coordinated by Commonwealth Corps sponsor organizations:

- YouthBuild Boston had approximately 150 volunteers join the Governor including Corps members from different organizations;
- Boston Cares had over

350 volunteers create over 2000 items to be donated to nonprofits in Greater Boston;

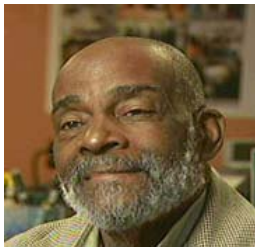
- North Central Charter Essential School hosted a day of celebration, reflection and service in honor of Dr. King with over 180 participants; and
- Commonwealth Corps member Linda Katz organized an event with the Hopkinton Youth Commission where over 700 volunteers worked on multiple projects, at several locations throughout the Town.



MLK Day Fun Fact:

In 1994, Congress passed the King Holiday and Service Act transforming this Federal Holiday into a National Day of Service.

Community leader offers insight on community service and leadership: An interview with Dr. Melvin H. King



Born in 1928 in Boston's South End, Dr. Melvin H. King's life's journey has brought him to serve in various roles as an educator, political activist, elected official and community leader, among others. In an interview, Dr. King shares his experience with community organizing, civic engagement and leadership. His overarching message: **"Love is the question and the answer."**

What is a key lesson that you have learned in your

years of experience that you would share with others?

Listening. Don't go into a situation with preconceived ideas and notions. It is important to be able to hear the issues, the experiences that the groups you work with have so that you get from them what their perceptions and thoughts are, sometimes, their ideas are about solutions.

Can you offer any advice on effective ways to build community leadership?

Being involved in solving problems, trying to make change, is part of building leadership. The recognition of need and acting or finding ways to respond to that need and solve the problem, instantly puts you in a leadership position. At the point that you raise the question

"what is needed to solve the issue?" and put it outside of you to others, means that you are in some sort of leadership.

What are some attributes that define a community leader/organizer?

People who (1) understand that people who they are working with have ideas. It is important to respond to these ideas. The more people are involved in sharing ideas, the more likely an effective solution will be found. (2) The "leader" should not feel they have to do things alone or that they have the only answer. (3) Lastly, people need to know that "love is the question and answer."

- Continued on page 4

Leadership Profile:

Dr. Melvin King is an American educator, activist and writer with a civic engagement record spanning over 50 years.

In 1981, Dr. King authored a book about his community work entitled "Chain of Change: Struggles for Black Community Development" where he discusses the development of housing, education, employment, and politics in Boston.

Interview with Melvin H. King (continued)

What are some strategies for pulling in community members to work on social causes?

(1) Inviting people to join with you and others who have raised similar issues and concerns. Again, the key is listening and inviting. Sometimes a comparison can be done based on what has happened to others in similar circumstances that had similar problems. It is important to know that others like them have been successful and learn from their strategies. (2) Show that you are willing to follow their lead and (3) always do things that build community through fun

activities.

When people think of community organizing and volunteerism, they associate it with young people, what sorts of opportunities are there for older adults to get involved?

It is important to understand that all of the time we are involved in doing things that are important for family, the workplace, etc., the opportunities are vast. All aspects of our lives have issues and needs that every one of us can play a role in. It has nothing to do with age or skills; we can find ways to contribute in many ways. We all serve in different ways everyday.

When talking about service, it is about sharing in the effort – not doing things that people can do for themselves. People sometimes ask you to do things and that takes the power away from doing things they could do themselves. It is the difference between “help” and “support.” Support is about supporting the strength that people have. Help usually assumes people don’t have the strength. Support says the people have initiated some of what they want to accomplish, it is a much more powerful organizing vehicle.

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Making a Difference

Preserving Neighborhoods

COMMONWEALTH LAND TRUST, INC.

Preventing Homelessness

Commonwealth Land Trust, Inc. Boston, Lawrence, Chelsea Corps members have allowed the agency to be more proactive about preventing crisis situations that could cause homelessness for residents. To date, the Corps has had an impact on 300 people by: reducing housing waitlists by 90%, drafting guidelines and policies to create a Resident Advisory Board for HIV/AIDS consumers, and developing community building opportunities for residents to build social relationship skills.

Governor visits Community-Based Learning Program Corps in action at the Dr. William R. Peck Elementary School



The Community-Based Learning Program (CBL) of Mt. Holyoke College tells the story of what it means to have volunteers from area colleges teamed up with public schools - working to make a difference in the academic and personal lives of students. “At Peck we are very aware that we can’t meet all of our students’ and their families’ needs by ourselves, and we’re working on continuously strengthening our relationships with local partner organizations and institutions,” says Peck Principal Paul Hyry, “our students benefit on a daily basis from the added academic support of having Commonwealth Corps college students in our classroom, [they] do a great job of helping our students have a stronger awareness of what college is like.”

At a visit to the Peck Elementary School in February, Governor Patrick visited a 6th grade ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom where Corps member Emma Mesa-Melendez assists with class instruction. The students chatted with the Governor and shared their policy studies projects. Corps members Sarah Vasquez, Miriam Stevens, Maria Diaz and community partners sat in a classroom with the Governor to share stories and experiences. The Governor thanked them for their service and advised them to “stay connected to these kids because they may get to the place where you [Corps members] are.”

CBL is a collaborative partnership of Mt. Holyoke College, Holyoke Community College and UMass Amherst. Together, they have recruited 12 College student volunteers to serve as Corps members at the William R. Peck Elementary School (K-8). Members are providing support for seven classroom teachers to

meet student’s educational needs through ESL support, individualized academic support, and assistance in various subject areas. The Corps “provides the infrastructure and the support students need to create a lasting relationship” states Principal Hyry. Members serve as tutors and mentors; they advance college



awareness among students and families in Holyoke via afterschool programs, workshops and supporting parents through the Engaging Latino Communities in Education Project. “We are opening their [Peck students’] eyes to something they didn’t know existed, our presence shows them we have succeeded and they can be that too,” says Corps member Maria Diaz.

Commonwealth Corps Member Spotlight

The Revolving Museum
Focus area: Arts & Education



Adam Norton is serving as the Web Manager for the Revolving Museum in Lowell. Currently a junior at UMass Lowell, Adam is working towards a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Art. He has been part of The Revolving Museum team for about three years; now he is a mentor and core-member of this program. **"Being a member of the Commonwealth Corps is providing me with exciting projects and rich experiences. Community service is a fantastic outlet of experiences that everyone should engage in. It allows you to get deeply in touch with a world that is very close to home, and greatly strengthens your connections with the city you live in."**

Worcester State College
Focus area: Hunger Awareness



Thea Aschkenase is an honorary Corps member, choosing to give up her stipend so that the program could take on an additional young person for the Corps. **"As a holocaust survivor I know firsthand how hunger hurts and how devastating it is not to know if there will be a next meal. I feel privileged to be a part of the Commonwealth Corps at WSC and participate in our project "Ending Hunger Together" I love being involved with the young people (our corps ranges in age from 18-85) on this project and am now helping to do food stamp outreach. I had the great opportunity to go to Worcester State College after my working career ended and after 10 years received my degree in Urban Studies. Now I feel privileged to be able to do something for my community."**

Generations, Inc.
Focus area: Mentoring & Literacy



Rose Napolitano has been heavily involved in volunteering. She had been engaged with her children's schools in the past, but became much more involved after her children had grown, using all her newly found free time to benefit the community. As a Corps member, she spends her time developing meaningful relationship with young children in Revere public schools while working on their literacy skills. The Corps is another way for her to stay active and engaged in her community, **"Volunteering is the most important thing in the world! Any way you can help, you get out there and do it. Don't wait until you're begged, just go do it"**

Mt. Holyoke College
Focus area: Tutoring & Mentoring



Sarah Vasquez is a tutor and mentor at Peck Elementary School in Holyoke. **"I participate in Commonwealth Corps because I wish I had a mentor/tutor when I was in middle school. I didn't have a mentor until much later when I attended Holyoke Community College. I feel like if someone was there earlier, it would not have taken me so long to figure out that college was an option or that I didn't have to be rich to get an education. It's important to me that students understand that school is an option, that is available to them and that they have every reason to explore their talents and ambitions now, so they may be nurtured. This is my chance to give back to a community that helped me to get where I am ."**

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Coming Soon!

Policy Essay Contest

Corps Members are service leaders in their communities, addressing unmet community needs and helping solve critical societal challenges.

Your Corps experience can be the impetus for a future in community change.

Do you have policy ideas based on your year of service? Have recommendations for a specific issue area?

Deadline to submit essay is April 10th!

For more information visit:
www.mass.gov/governor/commonwealthcorps

A Brief Timeline thru the Mid-Year

January 2007:	Governor Patrick filed a bill to create the Commonwealth Corps to enhance and build local communities, and to promote civic engagement in Massachusetts
December 2007:	Bill to create Commonwealth Corps enacted. The goal is to have 250 full-time and part-time volunteers in the first year
Spring 2008:	Commonwealth Corps Commission members sworn in to begin planning phase Mass Service Alliance is brought on board to administer the program
Summer 2008:	Through an RFP and community review process, 36 Sponsor organizations are selected for Commonwealth Corps
Fall 2008:	Sponsor Organizations enroll Corps members and begin service year
Winter 2008:	Early Service Trainings for CC members conducted in Boston & Holyoke; Facebook group page launches officially on Dec. 1 st
January 2009:	<u>274 active Corps members on the ground goal is surpassed before the service year is complete!</u> Governor participates in an all Corps service day at Roxbury Community College with YouthBuild Boston in Commemoration of Dr. King's legacy
February 2009:	Governor visits Peck Middle School students and Corps members serving from Mt. Holyoke College's program; Official Launch of Commonwealth Corps' first newsletter

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Facebook!**

facebook

Join our group page to stay connected, share information and receive updates on service activities.

If you are not on Facebook, it is fast and easy to sign up.

Visit:
www.facebook.com



Calendar of Events

FEBRUARY

February 25, 2009

➡ *The Politics of Food, an International Perspective*

Ending Hunger Together Corps Program-
Worcester State College

2:00pm – 4:00pm

North/South Auditorium, Worcester State College

Dave Andrews of World Food and Water Watch will present a global perspective on the politics of food. This is a free forum to raise hunger awareness. For more information email: Maureen.power@worcester.edu or Fran Langille (508)929-8900

MARCH

March 5, 2009

➡ *Revere Volunteer Tea Social and Appreciation*

Jack Satter House, 420 Revere Beach Blvd. Revere, MA

2:30pm - 4:30pm

A social for volunteers who serve with Generations Incorporated in Revere. Each of our three school sites will give an update on their progress. Volunteers will be able to connect with other volunteers. Refreshment will be served. For more information contact Michele Berry mberry@generationsinc.org or (617) 399-4668

APRIL

April 25, 2009 **Save the date!**

➡ *3rd Annual Park Serve Day*

Department of Conservation and Recreation
Location: In state parks and beaches across the Commonwealth

This is an opportunity for all of Commonwealth Corps to volunteer in this statewide service day. More information to come, visit www.parkserveday.org

MAY

May 6, 2009

➡ *Civic Engagement Summit*

University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
285 Old Westport Road, Dartmouth
Summit is designed to foster dialogue and develop strategies to increase community service, service learning, volunteerism, and civic participation. For more information contact Matthew H. Roy, Ph.D.

mroy@umassd.edu or (508) 910-9052.

May 13, 2009

➡ *Open House*

Minuteman Senior Services
24 Third Avenue, Burlington

3:30pm-5:30pm

Come learn about the essential services provided to older people and their family caregivers.

Refreshments and door prizes. For more information contact Patti Dubielak

p.dubielak@minutemansenior.org or (781) 221-7015

JUNE

June 14, 2009

➡ *The 1st annual Burlington Rotary Meals*

on Wheels 5K Road Race/Walk
Proceeds to benefit Minuteman Senior Services

Burlington High School

8:00am

Registration and sponsor information, please contact Patti Dubielak

p.dubielak@minutemansenior.org or (781) 221-7015



Volunteers -Explore Connect and Serve to learn about different volunteer opportunities in your area. Search by zip code, interest area, time availability, or specific organization name. Register and create a profile to receive e-mail updates listing volunteer positions that match your profile.

Organizations-

increase the visibility of your organization to recruit from a skilled pool of volunteers in Massachusetts. Register and post volunteer opportunities at your organization.

Visit:

www.volunteersolutions.org/mass-service/volunteer/



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Mary Jane Powell
Tim Sullivan
Madhuc Sridhar
Meg Vaillancourt
Mayor Lisa Wong

Have any
events, stories,
photos, ideas
that you would
like to
share with us?

Let us know!

Our Mission

Commonwealth Corps will work with non-profit organizations and public entities to reinvigorate civic involvement to help address the Commonwealth's most urgent needs. Commonwealth Corps members will work to strengthen the bonds of common purpose and unite people in service for the common good. Corps members will provide direct service, recruit, organize and mobilize additional volunteers—building a grassroots movement of volunteers dedicated to service.

2008-2009 Commonwealth Corps Sponsor Organizations

- Action for Boston Community Development, Inc.
- Alzheimer's Services of Cape Cod & the Islands, Inc.
- Boston Cares
- Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center
- Boston Learning Center
- Boys and Girls Clubs of Middlesex County
- Center for Human Development—BBBS of Hampshire County
- Codman Academy Charter Public School
- Commonwealth Land Trust, Inc.
- Generations Incorporated
- HAP, Inc.
- Horizons for Homeless Children
- Literacy Volunteers of Massachusetts, Inc.
- LUK Crisis Center
- MATCH-UP Interfaith Volunteers
- Mercy Hospital, Inc.
- Minuteman Senior Services
- Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust
- Mount Holyoke College
- North Central Charter Essential School
- North Shore Elder Services
- Pernet Family Health Services, Inc.
- Positive Action Against Chemical Addiction, Inc.
- Quaboag Valley Community Development
- Samaritans, Inc.
- The Center for Teen Empowerment, Inc.
- The Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center, Inc.
- The Revolving Museum
- University of Massachusetts Boston
- University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
- University of Massachusetts Lowell
- Valley Opportunity Council
- Worcester State College Intergenerational Urban Institute
- Year Up (Greater Boston/ Massachusetts)
- Young Entrepreneurs Society, Inc.
- YouthBuild Boston

Commonwealth Corps programs administered by Massachusetts Service Alliance